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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR KENNEDY VISITS MOSCOW IN ADVANCE OF
2009 PRAGUE CONFERENCE

11. (SBU) Summary. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Ambassador J. Christian Kennedy visited Moscow from March 22 to 25 to meet with Russian counterparts in advance of the June 2009 Prague Conference on Holocaust Era Assets. Ambassador Kennedy liaised with GOR representatives, NGO activists, Jewish community leaders, and art experts to pave the way for the conference, encouraging a recommitment to the Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art (outlined in the 1998 Washington Conference). Discussions revealed that while GOR interlocutors expressed goodwill and interest in cooperation, public sensitivity about World War II remuneration remained high. Jewish leaders expressed the need to navigate carefully any proposed property restitution to avoid an increase in anti-Semitism. Ambassador Kennedy also visited the Schneersohn Collection and discussed the importance to the Chabad community. End Summary.

Shvydkoy Cooperative Ahead of Prague Conference

12. (SBU) Ambassador Kennedy met with Special Consultant to the Russian President on Communications and Mass Media Mikhail Shvydkoy on March 23 to exchange viewpoints before formal negotiations at the Prague Conference in June 2009. Former Russian Minister of Culture Shvydkoy agreed with Ambassador Kennedy that historical revisionism was extremely detrimental to Holocaust education, proposing this subject as the focus point for discussions in Prague. He suggested that property restitution issues would not be appropriate for the conference, preferring constructive talks on improving universal "spiritual values" related to the sufferings of the Holocaust. Moreover, Shvydkoy stressed that any public acts of restitution -- including the return of art and books taken by Soviet forces from the Nazi regime -- would cause a "public scandal" and must be avoided at all costs. He explained that all things connected to World War II in Russia remained "very sensitive," and common sense dictated a very deliberate approach to such issues. He noted that discussions on property restitution should not progress until parties created and shared detailed inventories of the disputed items, but conceded that progress could be made on the Schneersohn Collection in the future.

Schneersohn Collection, Document Sharing

13. (SBU) Ambassador Kennedy met with Russian State Library (RSL) Deputy Director General Nina Khakhaleva on March 24 to discuss opportunities for cooperation on shared Holocaust-era archives, specifically regarding Nazi police and deportation records, slave-enforced labor, and displaced persons. While acknowledging its importance, Khakhaleva noted the difficulty and cost of document sharing, commenting on RSL's current painful transition from a paper-based catalog system to an electronic system. She also added that the Russian Historical Military Archives received all files obtained

during campaigns against the Nazis, saying that the RSL was not in a position to share this information. Ambassador Kennedy informed Khakhaleva that the United States would rotate into the presidency of the International Tracking Service (ITS) in May 2009, and hoped to advance the proposal of the creation of a network allowing scholars to search all related archives. Khakhaleva responded with interest, asking Ambassador Kennedy for a concrete proposal on how the Russian government could cooperate with the ITS.

¶4. (SBU) Khakhaleva escorted Ambassador Kennedy to meet RSL Oriental Center Director Sergey Kukushkin for a viewing of the Schneersohn Collection. On Ambassador Kennedy's inquiry about the Collection, Khakhaleva commented that the Schneersohn Collection had no relation to the Holocaust, but agreed that the Chabad community held these works in high regard. Ambassador Kennedy stressed the importance of safeguarding the collection. Khakhaleva told Ambassador Kennedy that the RSL did not rule out the possibility of digitizing them in the future, and would allow anyone (including Chabad) to visit the Collection during business hours. Kukushkin showed Ambassador Kennedy samples from the Collection and elaborated on the Oriental Center's catalog system, which listed the Collection's oldest book as being written in the 16th century.

Jewish Community Leaders Sensitive to Property Issues

¶5. (SBU) Jewish community leaders offered different views on prospects for the return of property, Judaica, and archives to communities throughout Russia. Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR) Director Aleksandr Boroda told Ambassador Kennedy on March 23 that the GOR viewed the transport of any Holocaust-era archives outside the country

as unacceptable, but did see some progress domestically. He believed that the most likely path for obtaining Jewish community records would be through long-term loans from the GOR, which would provide de facto full use of the documents in lieu of ownership. As with any issue involving the Jewish community, he noted the need to avoid the public eye as any favoritism shown towards Russian Jewry could stir anti-Semitism.

¶6. (SBU) With regards to the return of precious Judaica, Boroda said that the GOR required beneficiary communities to have a suitable museum or storage facility to preserve any state valuables. Russian Jewish Congress (RJC) Director Yuriy Kanner told Ambassador Kennedy on March 25 that he believed the Moscow Jewish community could easily produce the necessary funds for such a facility, but long-term financial questions could only be solved through the creation of a foundation. Concerning property, Boroda mentioned that the GOR had a program to return synagogues to the Jewish community, but there was no money in the budget for the program. Additionally, communities that received religious buildings from the government did not have sufficient funding for their maintenance.

Ambassador Allowed to See Disputed Art

¶7. (SBU) Ambassador Kennedy visited the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Art on March 24 to verify the condition of two works of art claimed by AmCit families. The meeting, initially refused by the museum and the Ministry of Culture, was arranged shortly after Ambassador Kennedy's discussions with Shvydkoy, suggesting the latter's interest in facilitating better relations. Deputy Director and Curator for the Pushkin Museum, Tatiana Potapova, blocked off a section of the museum for a private viewing, during which she and other museum experts conversed with Ambassador Kennedy about the style and condition of the works.

¶8. (SBU) Ambassador Kennedy also met with Russian art dealer and expert Andrei Ruzhnikov at his gallery below the Moscow Ritz-Carlton. Ruzhnikov boasted of his extensive knowledge

of the Russian art market, and provided several anecdotes about his connections with high-powered and corrupt Russian officials to validate his claims. After a private tour of his high-security showroom that included an original Renoir painting and extensive collections of tsarist-era enamel art, he claimed no knowledge of rumors that art looted from Nazi camps at the end of World War II existed in Russia, saying that he "would have heard about them" by now.

Anti-Semitism: Not Official Policy, but Has Deep Roots

¶9. (SBU) Ambassador Kennedy met with SOVA Center Deputy Director Galina Kozhevnikova on March 24 to discuss the current state of xenophobia in Russia, including an assessment of Russian anti-Semitism. Kozhevnikova explained that while no official policy of anti-Semitism exists in Russia (FEOR's Boroda agreed), most extremist-nationalist groups based their ideology on anti-Semitism even though they actively avoided using anti-Semitic slogans. She noted that Jews in Russia held fewer leadership roles in government and the financial market than in the past, pushing negative perceptions of Jews onto the backburner of phobias. Some nationalist groups like the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) and Slavic Union began using anti-Semitic propaganda more often in 2006, but with little public resonance. She added that the GOR actively prosecuted anti-Semitic activities (Note: she said it was easy for law enforcement to recognize anti-Semitic acts), deterring groups from espousing such comments. Both Boroda and Kozhevnikova differentiated between violent xenophobes, who have committed crimes against Jews in Russia, and "household anti-Semites" who regularly discriminate against Jews.

¶10. (SBU) On the subject of Holocaust education in Russia, Kozhevnikova told Ambassador Kennedy that teachers spent very little time, if any, covering the Holocaust in secondary schools. Moscow Bureau for Human Rights Director Aleksandr Brod told Ambassador Kennedy on March 25 that the GOR avoided focusing on the Jewish Holocaust as a specific subject in the educational system, saying any preferential attention given to one genocide would unfairly lessen the suffering of the other groups liquidated during the Stalin era. While the GOR prohibited officials from making anti-Semitic statements, several authors published anti-Semitic books every year, selling over 500,000 copies at book fairs in Russia annually. Many of these books, according to Brod, are blessed by local Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) priests. Boroda added that the resurgence of the ROC has generated an increase of

anti-Semitism, especially in the number of print publications lambasting Jewish culture, but expected that the demographic crisis would turn more Russians against Muslims in the future.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) Shvydkoy's interest in a "unified" position at the Prague Conference suggests that there is room for negotiation on key Holocaust-era issues. Domestic sensitivity to issues related to the Great Patriotic War, however, limits GOR flexibility just as the fear of increasing anti-Semitism limits Jewish community efforts.

¶12. (U) Ambassador Kennedy did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

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